

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 0881

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UR, US
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S JANUARY 18 CONVERSATION WITH PODGORNYY

REF: MOSCOW 871

1. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE USUAL PRACTICE, PODGORNYY INVITED ME FOR A PRIVATE CHAT AFTER THE PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS CEREMONY. THE CHAIRMAN WAS ACCOMPANIED BY GEORGADZE, SECRETARY OF THE PRESIDUM, DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KORNIYENKO AND AN INTERPRETER. GEORGADZE AND KORNIYENKO TOOK NO PART IN THE CONVERSATION; THE LATTER WAS NOTETAKER FOR THE SOVIET SIDE. EXCEPT FOR ONE OR TWO INFORMAL PERSONAL EXCHANGES IN RUSSIAN, I SPOKE IN ENGLISH AND MY REMARKS WERE INTERPRETED FOR PODGORNYY; THE CHAIRMAN SPOKE IN RUSSIAN AND MOST OF WHAT HE SAID WAS INTERPRETED INTO ENGLISH. PODGORNYY OBSERVED AT THE OUTSET THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD I WAS A COMPETENT RUSSIAN SPEAKER BUT HE FELT THE SERVICES OF AN INTERPRETER MIGHT BE REQUIRED. I TOLD PODGORNYY THAT MY EFFORTS TO LEARN CZECH AND SERBO CROATIAN IN PRAGUE AND BELGRADE WHERE I WAS POSTED AS AMBASSADOR IN RECENT YEARS HAD DONE MUCH TO SPOIL MY COMPETENCE IN RUSSIAN, BUT I HOPED THAT WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS I WOULD BE ABLE TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE.

2. PODGORNYY BEGAN THE CONVERSATION BY STATING THAT IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT I LAST SERVED IN MOSCOW IN 1965 AND THAT SINCE THEN
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I HAD HELD RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS IN WASHINGTON AND THEREAFTER HAD SERVED AS AMBASSADOR TO POLAND (I INTERJECTED TO TELL PODGORNYY THAT MY FIRST AMBASSADORIAL POST WAS CZECHOSLOVAKIA NOT POLAND) YUGOSLAVIA AND ISRAEL. I HAD NOW RETURNED TO MOSCOW AFTER AN ABSENCE OF SOME 12 YEARS AND PODGORNYY WONDERED IF I HAD NOTED ANY CHANGES.

3. I TOLD PODGORNYY THAT I HAD ARRIVED IN MOSCOW JUST TWO WEEKS

AGO AND HE WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS TOO SHORT A PERIOD IN WHICH TO REACH DEFINITIVE JUDGMENTS ON THE CHANGES WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE SINCE MY LAST INCUMBENCY HERE. MY INITIAL IMPRESSION WAS THAT MOSCOW HAD CHANGED SUBSTANTIALLY--BOTH IN MATERIAL AND IN HUMAN TERMS.

KALININ PROSPEKT, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS NEW TO ME AND I HAD NOTED ON THE MATERIAL SIDE EXTENSIVE NEW APARTMENT CONSTRUCTIONS AS WELL. IN HUMAN TERMS, IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THE PEOPLE ON THE STREETS OF MOSCOW LOOK MUCH BETTER THAN I HAD REMEMBERED THEIR APPEARANCE 12 YEARS AGO.

4. PODGORNYY SAID THAT I WAS RIGHT IN MY ASSESSMENT OF THE CHANGES THAT HAD TAKEN PLACE IN THE LAST 12 YEARS. THE PHYSICAL MAP OF THE CITY HAD CHANGED CONSIDERABLY AND THE STANDARD OF LIVING HAD IMPROVED SUBSTANTIALLY. THE CHAIRMAN THEN REFERRED TO THE FORMAL REMARKS WHICH

WE HAD MADE DURING THE PRESENTATION CEREMONY, NOTING THAT WE WERE IN AGREEMENT THAT WHILE MUCH GOOD WORK HAD BEEN DONE IN THE PAST IN IMPROVING OUR RELATIONS AND IN WORKING OUT MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AGREEMENTS THERE REMAINED A LOT TO BE DONE. HE ASSUMED THAT I WAS FAMILIAR WITH GENERAL SECRETARY BREZHNEV'S REMARKS TO AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN IN MOSCOW LATE LAST YEAR IN WHICH HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE FOR CLOSER AND MORE EXTENSIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES AFTER THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION IS IN OFFICE. THE GENERAL SECRETARY HAD SPOKEN ON THE SAME THEME TODAY IN TULA AND IF I HAD NOT HEARD HIS REMARKS ON THE RADIO AND TELEVISION HE ASSUMED THAT I WOULD READ THE TEXT AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY. PODGORNYY HIMSELF WAS HOPEFUL THAT PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER AND HIS NEW TEAM WOULD MOVE QUICKLY TO STRENGTHEN THE TIES BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES ALTHOUGH HE WAS FRANK

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TO SAY THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WERE SOMEWHAT DISTURBED AT NEGATIVE NOISES WHICH WERE MADE DURING THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN LAST YEAR. HE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN MY PERSONAL ASSESSMENT AS TO WHAT WE MIGHT EXPECT AFTER JANUARY 20.

5. I TOLD PODGORNYY THAT I COULD NOT SPEAK FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER; HE WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT I HAD BEEN APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT FORD AND, LIKE ALL AMBASSADORS, WOULD BE OBLIGED TO SUBMIT MY RESIGNATION ON JANUARY 20. I DID FEEL ON THE BASIS OF WHAT GOVERNOR CARTER HAD SAID DURING THE CAMPAIGN AND SINCE THE ELECTION THAT IT WAS HIS INTENTION TO WORK TOWARD A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND PARTICULARLY TO MOVE QUICKLY TO ACHIEVE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE SALT AGREEMENT BEFORE THE EXPIRY OF THE CURRENT INTERIM AGREEMENT. I THEN SPOKE AT LENGTH ALONG THE LINES OF THE TALKING POINTS APPROVED BY DEPARTMENT, STRESSING IN PARTICULAR THE FOLLOWING:

A. THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP SHOULD NOT DISMISS AS CAMPAIGN RHETORIC EVERYTHING THAT WAS SAID LAST YEAR SINCE MANY OF THE POINTS MADE BY GOVERNOR CARTER AS WELL AS PRESIDENT FORD REFLECTED THE

CONCERNS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

B. IT WAS IDLE, IN MY VIEW, TO TRY TO FOCUS BLAME ON ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER FOR PAST DIFFICULTY; IT WAS MUCH MORE FRUITFUL TO LOOK TO THE FUTURE.

C. WITH REGARD TO THE LEGISLATION WHICH PODGORNYY HAD LABELED AS AN INHIBITION ON TRADE EXPANSION, I WOULD POINT OUT THE AMENDMENTS (JACKSON-VANIK AND STEVENSON) ABOUT WHICH THE SOVIETS COMPLAINED HAD BEEN OPPOSED BY THE FORD ADMINISTRATION AND, IT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING, BY THE CARTER TEAM AS WELL. I PERSONALLY HAD TAKEN A STRONG STAND AGAINST THESE AMENDMENTS IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS WHEN I WAS BEING EXAMINED BY SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE ON OCCASION OF MY APPOINTMENT AS AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL. IT WAS MY HOPE THAT CONGRESS WOULD TAKE EARLY STEPS TO WORK OUT LANGUAGE --EITHER BY AMENDMENT TO OR DELETION OF THE EXISTING CLAUSES--WHICH WOULD MEET OUR REQUIREMENTS AND SATISFY THE SOVIET CONCERN.

D. WHAT WE HAD DONE IN 1972, 1973 AND 1974 PROVIDED USEFUL FOUNDA-

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TION FOR OUR FUTURE WORK. IT WAS NOW INCUMBENT ON BOTH OF US TO MOVE FROM PRINCIPLES TO CONCRETE RESULTS. WE SHOULD NOW SEEK WAYS OF PROVIDING INCREASED MUTUAL RESTRAINT AND CONSULTATION.

6. PODGORNYY REITERATED HIS GOVERNMENT'S KEEN INTEREST IN MOVING AHEAD ON A NUMBER OF FRONTS BUT SAID THAT THE SOVIETS ATTACHED HIGHEST PRIORITY TO STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATIONS. HE AGAIN REFERRED TO BREZHNEV'S TULA SPEECH AND SAID THAT THIS SHOULD BE SEEN AS A STATEMENT OF THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT'S POSITIONS ON THE WORLD ISSUES WHICH REQUIRE URGENT ATTENTION.

7. PODGORNYY WISHED ME WELL IN MY IMPORTANT MISSION TO MOSCOW AND HE COULD ASSURE ME THAT SOVIET OFFICIALS HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO COOPERATE WITH ME FULLY. I THANKED THE CHAIRMAN, TOLD HIM THAT I FELT PRIVILEGED TO SERVE IN WHAT SOME REGARD AS OUR MOST IMPORTANT DIPLOMATIC POST, AND I WOULD DO MY BEST TO CONTINUE AND EXPAND THE PROCESS OF IMPROVING OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS.

8. THE CONVERSATION LASTED ABOUT 55 MINUTES. TOON

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